

The Wilderness (63): A Reminder to Guard against Idolatry Deut 13

Moses has reminded Israel of how their wilderness experiences should translate into loving and obeying God (1-11). Now, he will start to rehearse the specifics of the law to make his points more defined.

How Was Israel Warned Against Idolatry?

1. Do not seek to follow **or mix false worship of neighbors**. 12:29-32
 - a. God has freed you from the slavery of false worship.
 - b. The desire to be like the heathen is opposite of being godly.
 - c. To worship God and other gods is an abomination.
 - d. This will lead to child sacrifice.
2. Do not seek to follow **false teachers or prophets**. 13:1-5
 - a. Many false teachers come from the religious community.
 - b. False teachers can do and say good/true things.
 - c. False teachers will eventually lead away from God.
 - d. God uses false teachers to test the obedience of His people.
3. Do not seek to follow **family members who worship falsely**. 13:6-11
 - a. Family members have a tremendous influence on worship.
 - b. Family members that worship falsely are difficult to discern.
4. Do not seek to follow **communities who worship falsely**. 13:12-18
 - a. Large numbers that worship falsely are hard to refute.
 - b. Large numbers that worship falsely have a lot of persuasion.
5. All promoters of false worship w/n Israel are **dangerous**. They were not to be spared but punished by death, "the ban."

4 Great Lessons

1. God is holy and will not share **His glory with anything**.
2. Idolatry is destructive **personally and to family/neighbors**.
3. The best way to discern false teaching is **to know the truth**.
4. Anything that counters Jesus is **false and opposes His work**.

Additional Notes

12:30 - To be "ensnared to follow them" has the idea of stumbling into a trap. This trap is manifested by self-interest to inquire how others worship their gods or practice their religion. The point is to seek the advice of those who do not follow or know God's revealed Word.

13:1-18 - This passage like chapter 12 deals with idolatry and is adamant about the purity of worship and the 1st two commandments. Chapter 12 focused on the sin of idolatry and chapter 13 emphasizes the idolater. The warning is that idolatry advances more from within than from without.

13:6, 8 - There are 5 next of kin listed that counterbalances with the 5 prohibitions. The seriousness of secret enticement is magnified by the death penalty and how it is to be processed. Clearly, this type of act is described as wickedness and the punishment was to ward of future mimicry by fear.

13:13 - These "corrupt" or "worthless" men are literally "sons of Belial" and this is the 1st time it occurs in the OT. The phrase is used of people who incite mischief against established authority (1 Sam 10:27) or bear false witness (1 Kgs 21:10).

13:15 - "Utterly destroying" is the Heb word "herem" which means "to devote" and in the case of the sentence of punishment is carries the idea of utter destruction. This was the "ban" the Lord placed on all the Canaanites and now it is equated to Israelite cities that follow their practices.

13:17 - Nothing from the ban/devoted/accursed things can be used. All had to be destroyed. This was the only remedy for God's anger on sin and to acquire His mercy, compassion, and future blessings of more offspring.

12:31 cp 13:17 - There is a contrast of future offspring or children. Those who embrace false religion (paganism) will lose/sacrifice their children, not having future (eternal) sons and daughters. Whereas, those who cling to God and follow Him wholeheartedly will see their seed multiply as divinely promised.

"Since we do not worship images of wood and stone, idolatry in our context may actually be more subtle. An idol is anything that deflects our devotion to Jesus Christ. It could be our career, our family, our hobbies, or our home. Preachers of a health and wealth gospel in our day push personal happiness and material success as if they were the ends for which we live and on the basis of which we make all our decisions. but this too is idolatry, twisting the gospel of divine grace and its call to take the name of Christ as a badge of honor and his cross as a privileged burden into a modern version of the fertility religions of the ancient Near East." Daniel Block, *Deuteronomy, The NIV Application Commentary*, p.399.